

MASON G. SMOAK



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

HIGHLANDS COUNTY, FL – The Youth Leadership Highlands program emphasized the importance of Highlands County agricultural and environmental industries last Monday, January 23, 2012, during a full day of leadership training. The Mason G. Smoak Foundation coordinates the program, and several different private and public organizations have taken part in educating a class of 17 sophomores from high schools within the county.

“I feel very blessed to have the opportunity to educate some of the youth of Highlands County about different aspects of the Florida cattle industry,” said John Smoak III, of Smoak Groves. Mr. Smoak met with the group and presented on the Florida cattle industry at Smoak Ranch.

The day was dedicated to learning about the importance of agriculture and the environment to Highlands County. The class began the day at Blue Head Ranch, where Susie Bishop, Business Development manager, and Binki Graham, Atlanticblue Specialty Crop and Turf manager, led the group, and discussed strawberry, blueberry and citrus production.

Following the tour at Bluehead, the class then traveled to Smoak Ranch, where they learned about the Florida cattle and dairy industries. Ray Hodge, Director of Government Affairs at Southeast Milk, spoke to the class about Florida’s dairy industry, and the importance of Florida farmers to the state economy. While at the Smoak Ranch, the Youth Leadership Highlands class also participated in leadership teamwork exercises that emphasized interpersonal communications.

Lastly, the group went to Happiness Farms, Inc. to learn about the Caladium industry that supports many local jobs and spotlights the area. Danielle Daum, Wholesale and Shipping manager, gave the students a tour of the packinghouse and taught the students about the caladium plant cycle.

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Jessie Sanders, a Youth Leadership Highlands participant said, "I had a great day today! It was so much fun...I'm loving the program and wish it would never end!"

The programs first three days have focused on social services, economic development and tourism, and agriculture and the environment. The class will meet two additional times to learn about Highlands County government and education, and business and health industries.

The Mason G. Smoak Foundation is a faith-based organization that is dedicated to supporting education, preserving and protecting the environment and fostering opportunities for leadership development.

For more information about the Youth Leadership Highlands program or the Mason G. Smoak Foundation please visit: www.masongsmoakfoundation.org or micah@masongsmoakfoundation.org.

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